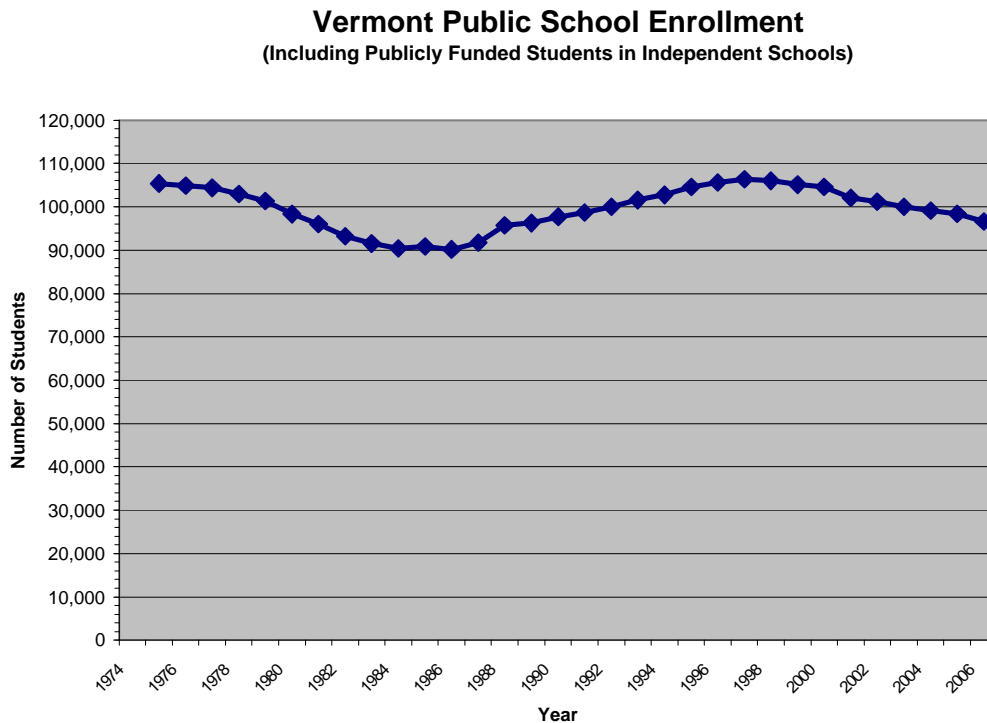


Vermont Education Governance: A Brief Primer

Vermont currently has 96,000 students in grades K through 12 public schools. The graph below illustrates the recent enrollment history. In 1997, enrollment reached a high of 106,000, but has been declining ever since. Although periodic fluctuations in student population will continue, economists predict that our student population will remain between 90,000 and 100,000 for the foreseeable future.

Historical data indicate that, in 1836, there were approximately 97,000 school-age children in Vermont. Therefore, we have essentially the same number of school-age children in Vermont as we had nearly two centuries ago.



There are several consequences of our declining student population:

1. Our school buildings are less crowded;
2. Our student-to-teacher ratio is very low; and
3. Our per-pupil spending is increasing.

In addition, there are three other factors in Vermont education that influence this governance discussion:

The Quality of Education – Vermont students generally outperform their peers from most other states on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) exams. No state had a higher average scale score than Vermont in fourth or eighth grade science. Of the 24 states in which 40 percent or more of the graduating class in public and private schools took the SATs, only four states had higher average verbal scores than Vermont. Six states had higher average scores in math.

The Cost of Education – In recent years, the per-student cost of education in Vermont has ranked between number three and number five in the nation. This is not generally viewed as being due to high spending, but due to a low teacher-pupil ratio.

Short Supply of School Leader Candidates – The annual turnover rate for superintendents and principals has been high over the past 20 years. In some years, as many as 25 percent of superintendents have left their positions. Departing superintendents often cite the complexities of working for multiple school boards as a key reason for leaving.

For the purpose of this discussion, education governance is defined as how the statewide education system is *structured*, how it is *administered*, how it is *run* and by *whom*.

Vermont schools are governed by elected boards of directors. Currently there are school boards for 239 town, city, or incorporated school districts; 39 union school districts; and two interstate school districts, resulting in a total of 280 school districts. Each of these has its own locally elected board of directors.

Administrative services are provided to most school districts by 46 supervisory unions. These services include but are not limited to special education, business management and curriculum coordination functions. However, supervisory unions do not operate any schools. Each supervisory union is composed of two or more districts, the average is six districts. Supervisory unions are governed by a board of directors composed of members of the participating districts. A typical supervisory union board has 15 to 25 members. Twelve school districts do not belong to a supervisory union and are referred to as supervisory districts. The boundary of each of those 12 supervisory districts is the same as the school district they serve. The two interstate districts are also classified as supervisory districts. One superintendent is employed by each supervisory union or supervisory district board, except for one supervisory union that has four superintendents.

Our 280 districts have roughly 1,500 school board members, roughly one school board member for every 64 students.

The Question: How should education governance in Vermont be structured?

In attempting to understand your views on this issue, we will be exploring the following two questions:

1. What are the advantages and disadvantages to the education governance system in your community?
2. What are the advantages and disadvantages to the education governance model put forth in Commissioner Cate's White Paper?